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GOLDFIELDS AND AGRICULTURAL
WATER SUPPLY AND HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript of an interview with

KEATING, Ken

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WATER CORPORATION OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

GOLDFIELDS AND AGRICULTURAL WATER SUPPLY
HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript of interview with

KENNETH JOHN KEATING

Father Ken Keating is the second son of *Reginald James Keating* (1903-86), Public Works Department engineer, GWS District Engineer, Northam, (1940-48), GWS Principal Assistant Engineer (1948-62) and Country Water Supply Engineer (1962-68). Reg Keating was awarded the Simpson Medal for advances in structural engineering for a joint paper with N. Fernie on 'Continuous Welding of Exposed Mains' (1935). In this interview Ken talks about his memories of his father and his engineering work.

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Interviewer:	Richard G Hartley
Date of interview:	25 September 2002
Duration:	36 minutes
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Transcriber:	Anne McBride
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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

KENNETH JOHN KEATING

Ken Keating is the Roman Catholic priest in charge of the Catholic parish at North Beach in Western Australia (2003). He is the second son of Reginald John Keating who was PWD Engineer Country Water Supply from 1962 to 1968. Ken was born in November 1939 in Northam where his father was the Goldfields Water Supply District Engineer. Ken had one, elder, brother called James who was born in January 1935. James did an engineering degree at the University of Western Australia and became an electrical engineer. While Ken was studying to be a priest at the Roman Catholic seminary at Guildford he drove his father along the GWS pipeline on one of his father's regular inspection visits to the GWS pumping station villages and to the district engineers and maintenance workers stationed along the pipeline. In this interview Father Ken talks about his memories of his father and of their inspection tour to Kalgoorlie.

REGINALD JAMES KEATING

Reg Keating, Ken's father, was born on 5 July 1903. Reg's father, James Keating, was a tailor who had his tailor's shop in Hay Street, Perth. James had been born in Melbourne and his parents had emigrated from County Tipperary. The family lived at 96 Vincent Street, Highgate. Reg had four brothers one of whom became Assistant Commissioner of Taxation and was still alive in 2003. Reg was educated at Sacred Heart School, Highgate, and Christian Brothers' College (CBC) in St. George's Terrace, Perth. He was a competent sportsman at school and played bowls and cricket into middle age. He was dux of CBC in 1920 and was awarded a Government Exhibition to the University of Western Australia (UWA). In his first year at university he studied the preliminary subjects for a medical degree but as UWA did not have a medical faculty if he had decided to pursue a medical career he would have had to continue his studies at a university in the eastern states. However, at the end of first year he decided to transfer from medicine to engineering. The medical classes had been held in the temporary premises in Irwin Street in central Perth but the engineering classes were held in Shenton House on the Crawley campus, the engineering faculty having been the only department to have held its classes there from the commencement of the university.

On completion of his civil engineering course (BE 1926) Keating joined the Public Works Department (PWD) and worked initially as an assistant engineer on water supply projects in the central and south-eastern wheat-belts. He married in 1932 and the couple's first home was a PWD tent. In 1933 Keating was transferred to the Goldfields Water Supply Branch as Assistant District Engineer at Northam under W.K. (Kirk) Weller, the GWS Engineer, and Norman Fernie, Northam District Engineer. Keating took part in the trials of the method of relaying the GWS main conduit above ground as a continuously welded pipeline which had been devised by Fernie to overcome the chronic problem of leakage at the leaded joints between pipes. In 1935 Fernie and Keating jointly authored a paper entitled 'Continuous Welding of Exposed Mains' which described their new method of laying large diameter water mains above ground in Australian conditions. For this paper the Institution of Engineers, Australia, awarded each of them the Chapman Medal for advances in structural engineering. When Fernie was appointed Director of Industrial Development in 1940 Keating was made GWS District Engineer Northam, a position which he had held in an acting

capacity on a number of occasions when Fernis had been seconded to other duties. In 1948 Keating was transferred to Head Office as GWS Principal Assistant Engineer under GWS Engineer George Hammond at the commencement of the implementation of the extension of the GWS as part of the Comprehensive Water Supply Scheme. When the Country Towns Water Supply Branch was combined with the GWS in 1962 to become the Country Water Supply Branch (CWS) Keating was appointed CWS Engineer, a position he held until his retired in June 1968. Subsequently he served on the Board of the Metropolitan Water Board for five years. He died in December 1986. He was predeceased by his wife who died only three months before Keating retired.

KENNETH JOHN KEATING

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- 1 Ken Keating (KK), Roman Catholic priest at North Beach, Western Australia, is the second son of Reginald John Keating (RK) who was born on 5 July 1903, educated at Sacred Heart School, Highgate, and Christian Brothers College, St George's Terrace. Brother of RK, Kevin Keating, became Asst Comm. of Taxation. RK's father was James Keating (JK), a tailor with a shop in Hay Street who was born in Melbourne and whose parents came from County Tipperary. The Keating family lived at 96 Vincent St, Highgate. RK was Dux of CBC in 1920...
- 2 Gained a Gov. Exhibition to UWA, studied first year medicine (Irwin St), transferred to engineering in second year (at Crawley). Completed BE in 1925, joined PWD, working initially in central wheat-belt. Married late 1932, first home a tent but mother preferred to stay with cousins Fitzpatricks in Merredin.
- 3 1933, RK becomes asst DE at Northam. RK used to drive father's car as JK could not drive. Story of JK's letter to the *West Aust.* re language at football.
- 4 JK's parents both illiterate. RK had two sons, James (born Jan 1935) and Kenneth (born Nov. 1939). Early war advertisement in *Record* for schooling with 'good swimming pool' (a GWS tank).
- 5 RK Northam DE in 1939, took KK to big pipe burst at Meckering, to place where continuous welding started, to GWS building Northam. RK egalitarian, drank with Inspector Benzie, clerk Mick Lynch and Ted Barker. KK called Workers' Club 'Dad's office' to Mum. She joined too. Her phone call to Benzie about taps and grass. Brother did electrical engineering, KK to Guildford seminary. Took RK on GWS tour to Kal...
- 6 On country tour RK took engineers to pub. Telephone box for track phone at Old Barracks (later called Dr Who). Shown wooden pipes between Coolgardie and Kal. Story of angry crowd at SX over poor water flow, ticket to Quo Vadis. Always given tea and scones. RK's story 'better to know Johnny'.
- 7 Mum's assessment of young engineers at Christmas party. She died March 1968 and Dad retired in June 1968. On board of MWB for 5 years – said he enjoyed the meal best.
- 8 Went to country as often as possible. Parents happiest at Northam. Holidayed in Perth, stayed at hostel in Cottesloe. Also to Perth to see relatives. RK had four brothers. Grandparents went on world trip. Jim's sister was nun in Los Angeles and sent kids large rosary beads. Grandmother died in Melbourne on way home.
- 9 Visited PSs with RK, all steam bar one. Dad great engineer but couldn't do much else, so Mum got others to do jobs. Joint paper with Fernie.
- 10 RK explained expansion of steel pipes and right temperatures to weld. Meckering burst, no swimming said RK. Story that Fernie did not tell HO about continuous welding trials. RK was going to South Africa to talk about the technique but war intervened.
- 11 KK does not remember RK being called out at night. Dad was very good at delegating.
- 12 Trusted local men but knew the weak links in the chain. Social life in Northam. RK at the Workers' Club. In Perth went to Captain Stirling on way home.

- 13 Played bowls and cricket, competent sportsman. Saying about 10 doing one job rather than one man doing ten. KK also delegated in parish. RK probably voted Labor but never admitted it. Preferred to vote for the man.
- 14 Supported Bert Hawke but living in Nedlands said vote was superfluous. RK man of the people who believed in justice. Supported David Brand. Story of RK and Brand in plane looking at pipeline.

RGH
17 April 2004

GOLDFIELDS AND AGRICULTURAL WATER SUPPLY HISTORY

Interview with Ken Keating

on 25 September 2002 at North Beach, Western Australia

Interviewer: Richard G. Hartley

RH This is Richard Hartley speaking. I am talking to Father Ken Keating at his presbytery in North Beach, on 25 September, 2002. Good morning, Ken.

KK Good morning Richard.

RH I was going to ask you about your father. When was he born? Where did he go to school?

KK He was born in 1903, I think. Yes. He went to school in Sacred Heart, Highgate, and then after that, he did his secondary schooling at Christian Brothers College, The Terrace.

RH That was the precursor of Trinity College, wasn't it?

KK That's right. It was pulled down later on and became the Taxation Department {laughter} where one of his brothers presided.

RH Oh!

KK Kevin Keating, who was the Assistant Commissioner at the time.

RH Oh yes. And where did he live when they lived with his parents?

KK 96 Vincent Street, Highgate.

RH And what was his father's occupation?

KK His father was a tailor.

RH Oh. Was he born in Western Australia, or did he come over from the east?

KK No, he was born in Melbourne.

RH How many generations of the Keatings have been in Australia? I presume they came from Ireland originally.

KK I, myself, am third generation. Yes. They came from County Tipperary.

RH Your father was a brilliant scholar at school, I believe.

KK He was, yes. He did his final year at school in 1920. He was the dux of his college. He won a medal called the Pinderboor Medal – and I don't know how to spell that!

RH Pinderboor.

KK It was one of the men who died in the war.

Note: Transcript is verbatim except for minor editing which is indicated by squared brackets, thus []

RH The Boer War?

KK No, the First World War.

RH Yes.

KK He also got a Government Exhibition, and so he went off to university and he started doing medicine. At the end of the year, the professor said, *Mr Keating, you are not very good at cutting up frogs, are you?* And he said, *No, I am not.* And he said, *Well, then, I will give you a pass in first year engineering.* {laughter}

RH So he started off in the Irwin Street [buildings of UWA]. That's where the medicos were I believe.

KK He did, yes.

RH Right. And he went out to the Crawley

KK UWA.

RH At that time, [I believe] the engineering faculty was the only one there, I think. Yes.

KK Well, I wasn't alive so I couldn't tell you!

RH Yes, Shenton House. But he didn't join the Public Works Department until he left university. Is that right?

KK That's right. He finished in 1925.

RH So he joined straight away.

KK He did.

RH And, from your photographs, he must have been out in the back blocks doing water supply work.

KK Yes, he was in the central and south-eastern wheat-belt for while, [judging] by some of the photos that we have got. In December 1925, when they were living in tents! {laughter}

RH Yes. Well, that must have been quite common then!

KK Yes.

RH And when did he get married?

KK That, I'm not absolutely sure, but I think it was 1932 or 33.

RH Oh. So he had already moved to Northam by then, had he?

KK No. From my memory, Mum and Dad actually lived in a tent before that when he was building some dams up there in the town that is mentioned here on the photos. She tells the story of pouring boiling water down a hole when a snake came up to visit her. {laughter} So, she was there for a while, but not for very long, and then she used to stay with some of her cousins – the Fitzpatricks in Merredin.

RH Oh.

KK And then it was later on in 1933 that they went to Northam. I can just about work out when they were married, because they were married for 35 years and Mum died in 1968.

RH 1933.

KK 35 years they were married.

RH Yes.

KK 1933. They must have got married then, late '32 or early '33. Probably late '32, I think.

RH So they had the usual Public Works Department's wives' induction by living in a tent for a bit.

KK Yes, that's right, which Mum didn't appreciate. {laughter} as she had to rough it somewhat. Yes, she lived quite well with her parents.

RH Going back a bit, you said that your father had the use of a car at university and that it belonged to his father.

KK Yes.

RH But his father couldn't drive it.

KK No, Grandfather couldn't drive the car. Dad used to drive him down to see one of his brothers who lived at Fremantle and they'd get halfway and then Grandfather James, would get out of the car and say, *These are silly things! I am going to walk the rest of the way!* {laughter}

RH Was your father going too fast?

KK Oh no. He just thought that any good gentleman would walk that distance! {laughter}

RH He was a great writer of letters to the paper, you were telling me.

KK Yes. Grandfather was.

RH What were they usually about?

KK Oh well, it was normally just to give a little bit of edge to secularism as against Catholicism.

RH Oh.

KK Or matters of politics and things like that. Do you want me to give you the gist of one of the ones I told you? {laughs}

RH Yes. {laughs}

KK One of the letters he wrote went something like this – to the *West Australian*.

Dear Editor, A friend and I were at Lotons for the football last Saturday and, as gentlemen do at half time, we went to a local establishment to quench our thirst. When there, we heard the most abominable use of the English language, quite incomprehensible. So much for education that is secular compulsory and free.
Sincerely, James Keating.

RH [laughs] I like the 'gentlemen' bit! 'As gentlemen do'!

KK Yes, as gentlemen were wont to do! {laughter} Are wont to do!

RH Yes.

KK In the context of the fact that neither his mother nor his father could read or write and, when they were married, they just put an "X" alongside their name. By his mark and by her mark.

RH Remarkable! Yes. So he had a good Catholic education, anyway.

KK Yes. I don't know where he did.

RH You were born in 1939.

KK Yes.

RH Were you the elder of the two boys?

KK No, I was the younger of the two.

RH Oh.

KK I was born in November, '39 and my brother was born in January, '35.

RH What was his name?

KK His name was James, too. Called by his friends – Jim. But not by his mother!

RH Oh no, naturally. I was asking you how much you remember about the wartime [period of you father's] work.

KK Yes. Now, let's think. What did I remember? {laughter} There is a Catholic newspaper called the *Record*.

RH Oh yes.

KK And one day Dad came home quite flustered because there was an advertisement in it from the Mercy Sisters saying, Avoid the dangers of occupying troops. Let your children stay with us. We have all facilities, including a good swimming pool. {laughter} And that was the part that upset Dad. It was a full dam, waiting for retreating troops. {laughter} He being afraid that he'd be set up.

RH Yes. I bet quite a few people did contemplate going to the Goldfields from Perth.

- KK That's right. They did, yes. I also remember, as a young lad there, at that time going to a great, big, pipe burst at Meckering.
- RH Yes.
- KK And it was enormous. I also remember him taking and showing my brother and I where he and Mr Fernie had started off their continuous welding.
- RH Oh yes.
- KK I can also remember his workplace – the Goldfields Water Supply building there. I always remember Dad as being very –what they would call these days -- egalitarian. He would always mix with everyone. I remember him working with Mr Benzie in the yard and having drinks with him and also with another guy called Mick Lynch, who was in the office in a clerical role
- RH Lynch, was it?
- KK Yes, Mick Lynch.
- RH Oh yes.
- KK And also Ted – [I think his second name was Baker]. Uncle Mick and Uncle Ted, I used to call them. Anyway, he also was somewhere there. I also remember as a young fellow pointing out to my mother the Workers' Club.
- RH Right.
- KK And saying, that's Dad's office! {laughter} So after a couple of years of Dad playing bowls there and getting home late on Saturday evenings, Mum developed a philosophy that if you can't beat them, join them. So she decided to go down and sit with the ladies and do a bit of war work for the Red Cross and, at the same time, have the odd beer herself, and they'd both arrive home happy! {laughter} I also remember too that Mr Benzie used to get a phone call every now and again and [Mum would] say, well, Reg is away for days working overtime for the government. Well, they can do something for me. I have three taps up here that need to be fixed, plus the lawn needs mowing. Please send somebody up!
- RH {laughs} Oh, she was a smart lady, your mother.
- KK Oh yes, absolutely! There was a man came out from America, a fellow called Father Paton, and he had the saying, the family that prays together, stays together, and Mum said, that may be true, but I also believe that it's the family that plays together that stays together.
- RH Yes. I believe you went with your father on one of his trips up the country. That was a bit later, when you were at the seminary, wasn't it?
- KK Yes. That was a bit later. Well, by then, my brother was finishing his engineering degree in electrical engineering, and I had started my studies at the seminary [in Charles Street, Guildford] to be a priest. So we went from Perth to Kalgoorlie and we stopped at every pump station and we also went to some of the side places [off the pipeline such as] Bruce Rock and then we went down to Ardath and places like that.

- RH Yes.
- KK But, Dad would stop at every one of these offices and go in and talk with the engineers and so on, and after about half an hour, he'd come outside, throw his hands in the air and – I knew what that meant.
- RH Oh?
- KK He was taking them down to the pub for a drink. {laughter} And then he would come back and tell me what the aim of his trip was. The aim was to let the engineers know that he was there for them. If they needed any help, they were to ring him before things got in a very bad state. And, if in doubt, ring him anyway. And, of course, I was fascinated as a young boy because he had his own telephone box outside his office at the Old Barracks Building.
- RH Oh yes.
- KK Where they could ring all the pump stations just in case of a breakdown to stop pumping and so on.
- RH Yes.
- KK Later on it was known more as Dr Who.
- RH {laughs} Oh! Yes!
- KK Yes, so he said that's why he did it, and then he also took me and showed me the wooden pipes between Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie.
- RH Yes.
- KK He also told me the story of when he had to go and face a very angry crowd in Southern Cross, because they reckoned the volume of water – what do you call it, the flow – was pretty rotten. You'd only get a dribble of water out of the pipes. Of course, he was unable to tell them that they needed to get enough water through to Kalgoorlie so all the pipes have a stricture within them so they wouldn't get too big a volume anyway. {laughter} But he wasn't allowed to tell them that!
- RH Oh.
- KK He stood up before this angry crowd, he tells the story, and he didn't know what to say. Then he put his hand in his pocket and he drew out, and it was a ticket. And so he said to the assembled people, he said, I've just got something out of my pocket, he said, it's a ticket to a film called *Quo Vadis* and I think I can understand how the early Christians felt about being thrown to the lions! {laughter} One of his favourite stories that saved the day.
- RH Yes.
- KK And then after that, he said he'd go around and visit people and he had said that he liked tea and scones. When he got home, he had to kind of throw up the scones! {laughs} He had had so much! But he always maintained his one big saying to me was, if you want to teach Johnny mathematics, it is better to know Johnny than it is

to know mathematics, and so he carried that out with his engineers. It was more important to know them than anything else.

RH He also had another adviser on his engineers. That was your mother wasn't it?

KK That's right, yes.

RH You told me about some of her methods!

KK Dad would get new engineers straight from university, and the whole year he would be trying to assess them as to who would be good for what and, finally at the end of the year, he'd reach his decision. And then at the Christmas party – I think it was the Christmas party put on by Hume Steel.

RH Right.

KK I think the name of the man who was in charge of it was Ossie Lovelock. During that get-together, the young engineers would be there and they would be paraded one by one before my mother {laughter} and she would speak to them for a few minutes. Then she would summarise, like, oh, he's a nice boy, but he won't be a great engineer! {laughter} Or, this one, oh, no, you wouldn't really have him at all actually. And then about another guy, he's bright and he's a bit cheeky, but he's the one that really will be the best leader. And Dad would scratch his head and wonder how Mum could do {laughs} in fifteen minutes what had taken him ten months to work out. {laughter}

RH I hope they came to the same conclusions.

KK Oh yes, they did, actually. When Mum died, many people said to me, your Mum and Dad were good mates.

RH Yes.

KK In one sense, Mum dying was very sad, but one of the proudest moments of Dad's life was when we got from the church down to Karrakatta and there were over 150 people from work who had come down to pay respects to Mum. And that was quite something.

RH Yes. So was your father still at work then?

KK Yes. Mum died in March of '68, and then Dad retired in June, so it was a very sad year for him.

RH Yes.

KK After that, he had a little consolation. He was invited to be on the Metropolitan Water Board for five years.

RH Oh yes.

KK And he used to do his homework before he went, but he enjoyed the meal the best! {laughter} And being an engineer, he by-and-large agreed with the Chief Engineer at the discussion.

RH That was very diplomatic! {laughter} How often did he go up to the country, when he was stationed in Perth?

KK As often as he could possibly get away.

RH Did he? Oh! {laughs}

KK I don't know how often that was, but it was every chance he had.

RH Yes.

KK That was where he felt happiest.

RH Did he?

KK Yes, he really did.

RH Do you think he enjoyed his time at Northam more than working in Head Office?

KK Yes. The day before my mother died of a stroke, they had been in Northam and they both had said that night that that's where they were the happiest together. Yes.

RH It's a pretty uncomfortable place to live in the summer, though, isn't it?

KK Yes, it is – very uncomfortable. Yes.

RH Did they ever escape anywhere, or go up to the hills?

KK The only thing I can remember is that we used to come down to Perth and I can remember staying, at least once, at the hostel in Cottesloe. What was the name of that hostel? There are shops there now, I think.

RH Yes. I can't remember now.

KK Yes. It had a name of its own. We used to go down there swimming and so on. Yes. So that used to be a very happy affair. And also we'd come down quite often to Perth as. Mum's sister and others were down here, and Dad's brothers were here also, so we'd come down and see them.

RH Do he have a big family of brothers and sisters?

KK Dad had four other brothers. Yes. My mother said, no wonder your mother died when she was young, having five boys! {laughter}

RH Yes!

KK She died, actually, in Victoria – my grandmother -- when she and Grandfather went on a trip around the world.

RH Oh really.

KK One of their most famous stories was about Los Angeles, where Jim, my grandfather, had a sister in the convent there at the Little Sisters of the Poor. So they stayed with the sisters and she arranged for some fairly wealthy guy to take them all around the place. Yes, so later on, as kids, having a great-aunt in

America, of course, she would send us out enormous rosary beads and pictures such as we'd never seen in poor Australia! {laughter}

RH Do you remember actually going into the pumping stations yourself? Were you allowed to look through them when you drove your father up?

KK Oh yes. He took me right into them, and you'd listen to them – you know, they'd be ... they'd go *shroomp, boomp, boomp boomp* and then *shhhhsh!* They had that very distinctive sound about them, I always remember that. See them coming back – *BOOM*. A bit of water flying all over the place as well, because they were still the old steam engines.

RH Yes.

KK There was one, I think ... one was electric, I think ... was becoming electric, or was electric. Getting there, anyway, but they were still the old steam.

RH Yes, they must have been marvellous to see.

KK Oh, for a young boy, I thought it was magnificent. Dad was a great engineer, but he couldn't do anything else much. I used to watch him on a Sunday trying to get the lawn mower out – the old push lawn mower – and it would take him an hour and a half to sharpen the blades and, even then, they wouldn't be properly sharp. {laughter} And by then it would be morning tea time. {laughter} He could tell you how to build anything, but he couldn't build it himself. He couldn't put a nail in a wall. He couldn't put a screw in or anything! {laughter} Hence Mum giving up the fight and getting others to do it!

RH Yes, well, she had the right idea, didn't she? {laughs}

KK Yes.

RH And the paper he did with Norm Fernie

KK Yes.

RH That's still quite a famous one, really, because it won the Chapman Medal ...

KK Yes, it did.

RH And there was only one other paper from Western Australia that has ever won the Chapman Medal.

KK Was there?

RH Yes.

KK Yes.

RH He did the mathematical side of it, I think, and Fernie did a lot of the practical side.

KK Yes, I can remember when I was, you know, a young fellow and even afterwards, the Keating tradition of maths and physics and chemistry lingers in me.

RH Oh?

- KK Even though I then went off to do more Latin and Greek and philosophy and so on, but I can always remember him describing to me, you know, the co-efficient of expansion, you know, of the steel pipes, which he was having to work out the difference between summer and winter, and then, to get it right during the winter when they welded the pipes, they would have to light a fire under them to get the right temperature, and then during the summer they would be putting water over it to cool it down, to get the right temperature to weld.
- RH Yes.
- KK And he used to talk about that. And then later on, I found a copy of it all and read the actual things they put in it.
- RH There's some good pictures of bursts in that one, isn't there?
- KK Yes, there is.
- RH You were talking about the one at Meckering, but there were quite a few really big ones.
- KK There were.
- RH That form into lakes! {laughs}
- KK Oh, I can remember the lake at the one I saw. I just couldn't believe it. I said, Dad, can I go for a swim? He said NO! {laughter} The other thing about it was, of course, this is anecdotal, I guess, but as I believe it, he and Fernie did not tell the authorities in Perth what they were doing. They did it, and then later on they proved that that was the section of the pipeline that had hardly a leak at all, whereas, of course, the rest of it was renowned for leaking, with rivets and tar and so on.
- RH Yes, that's right. The first one they did was unofficial.
- KK Absolutely unofficial.
- RH Yes. And then they were allowed to do another one, another trial for a year.
- KK Yes.
- RH And after the year, they were allowed to do it on a large scale.
- KK Yes. They did.
- RH It must have taken a lot of organisation though.
- KK Oh sure. Yes. That's right. Dad was going to go to South Africa to show them how to do it, but I think either the war broke out or something went wrong.
- RH Oh really?
- KK Yes.
- RH That's interesting.

- KK It fell through. I am not sure if it was the war, or what it was. It was something big happened in South Africa.
- RH But he still had to get up in the middle of the night for when there were emergencies though, even when the pipeline was above ground.
- KK Yes, I can't remember any of that. I would have been a bit too young and sleeping, I think.
- RH Yes. So what about during the war period – did he get called out at night then?
- KK Not that I can remember.
- RH No.
- KK I learnt from Dad how to be a good delegator. As my mother said once, if your father could take his car to the toilet, he would. {laughter} His famous saying was you should never waste energy needlessly.
- RH Oh.
- KK But, by and large, he would trust the local man, you know, to look after it and that's what his point was. If it is too much for you, I don't mind when you ring me or anything. That was the main point. It was the person to person thing. But Dad, you wouldn't get him moving unless it was necessary.
- RH Yes. Well, you had to, as you said, know Johnny to know what he could do.
- KK That's right, he did, yes. He'd know him.
- RH And [the pipeline] went over such a long length, it was important to have the right people in the right places.
- KK That's right. Yes. And he knew where the weak links were, both in the pipeline and in who was there. Not everyone could be as good as the other guys, you know. That wasn't to down grade them. It was just that he knew that some weren't quite as good, that's all. But all of them were equally welcome to ring.
- RH What sort of social life did he have in Northam? Was he a member of the Commercial Club and all those sorts of things?
- KK Well, Dad used to go to the Workers Club.
- RH Oh, did he? {laughs}
- KK He was like that – even when he came to Perth, he'd drive my mother a bit mad. He wouldn't socialise a lot [but he liked to have a social drink on the way home]. When he was in Perth he used to love to go to the Captain Stirling¹ and have a drink or two there with Lou, a foreman from Winterbottoms.
- RH Oh yes.

¹ The Captain Stirling Hotel, Stirling Highway, Nedlands

KK And some other guy who was an electrician or something like that. And they were his main drinking companions. When he was in Northam, he was in the Bowling Club. He also continued to play cricket.

RH Oh, did he?

KK Yes, when he was there.

RH He was he a good sportsman, then?

KK He was quite good. Yes. He wasn't in the top bracket, but he was quite competent and so on. One of his sayings that I forgot was – it's an old saying that we know – it's better to get ten men to do one job each than it is for you to do ten jobs yourself.

RH Yes.

KK Something like that. It's an old saying, isn't it?

RH Yes, it was something that the Depression generation always remembered, wasn't it?

KK Yes. That's right.

RH They had responsibilities to employ other people as well.

KK Yes. And keep your eyes [open for the opportunities], you know, and I have done that in my work here in the parish. I've delegated my authority to people here, in different areas, like maintenance and finance and adult education and so on. They have their budgets and responsibilities, plus budget needs authority. And I learnt that from Dad.

RH It must be a bit of a management job running a parish.

KK It is. Yes.

RH Yes.

KK It was put to me by a friend of mine, Bishop Bianchini, who says, we're not running a business, but we have to be businesslike in our administration.

RH Yes. Did your father have anything to do with politics?

KK No.

RH Was he a Labor supporter, or ...

KK Oh ...

RH Someone like Fernie, who was always a very strong Labor supporter.

KK Yes. Dad never told us how he voted, but I knew what he believed in, and so I probably think that he was, but when I heard him talking – he wanted to know more about who the candidate was.

RH Yes.

KK For instance, when he was in Northam, he had no problems voting for Bert Hawke, as he said he was a very good man. {laughs} That was the way he was. But then we ended up living in Nedlands, so as Dad said, your vote was a bit superfluous! {laughter}

RH Yes!

KK We lived in Kensington for a few years when we came down from the country, and I don't know what he voted then. He was a man of the people who believed very much in justice and very much in his men being treated properly and well. He didn't particularly like the political side of his job. He tells one story of a man whom he loved very much, and that was David Brand.

RH Yes.

KK He thought he was a wonderful guy and he would have voted for him purely because he knew he was a good premier.

RH Yes.

KK But they were in a plane on the way [laughs] up to Geraldton and, on the way, they were passing over these big paddocks and they were talking about a pipeline down below. And he said, well it can go straight through there, says David Brand. Says Dad, yes, he said, you can do that. And the farmer won't be very happy at *all*, or you could spend an extra hundred thousand dollars going around the lot of them! Said David Brand, not a word! [laughter]

RH He was a man of the people, anyway, wasn't he?

KK He was. That's why Dad loved him so much too.

RH Yes.

KK Yes, he thought he was really great.

RH He always got water supply works done in his electorate very promptly. {laughter}

KK Did he?

RH Yes.

KK That's something! {laughs} Oh yes.

RH Well, I know that you are very busy, so I won't take up any more of your time. It has been very interesting and very useful, Ken. Thank you very much.

KK Good. You are very welcome to come, Richard, and I really have enjoyed remembering things about my father, that I haven't thought about for ages.

End of interview.

29 March 2003. A Mc / RGH

WATER CORPORATION

GOLDFIELDS WATER SUPPLY HISTORY PROJECT

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